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L E T T E R

T O

Dr. P R I E S T L E Y:

OCCASIONED BY HIS

H I S T O R Y

O F T H E

Corruptions of Christianity;

WHEREIN HIS

*Socinian Errors are fully confuted, by Arguments
drawn from the Holy Scriptures.*

By EDWARD SHEPPARD, A. B.
RECTOR of BETTISCOMB, Dorset.

DIDST THOU NOT SOW GOOD SEED IN THY FIELD, WHENCE
THEN HATH IT TARES?

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L E T T E R

T O

Dr. P R I E S T L E Y.

S I R,

I Lament with you the great corruptions that were brought into the church of Christ, soon after the introduction of christianity into the world. Ecclesiastical history informs us of the time and manner in which they crept in; and there is no event of more importance and advantage to us at present, than that reformation which was effected principally by the writings of Luther and others, who saw clearly the gross perversions of divine truth prevalent in their day, and had the courage to oppose them by arguments drawn from the holy scriptures. England, and other countries of Europe enjoy the happy effects of their light and zeal at this day. It is also matter of grief to all who love

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and

and reverence the holy scriptures, that since that reformation hath taken place in these kingdoms, men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, have risen among themselves, who have not only denied the great doctrinal truths which all the protestant churches assent to, but have also endeavoured to root out those which the catholic church maintained in her most degenerate state. The fall of man—the necessity of an atonement—the Godhead of the Son and Spirit, were held by Romanists at the time of the reformation; and they continue to be held in common by Protestants and Papists at this day. Nay, they were ever considered as the standard of orthodoxy in all ages of the christian church. These fundamental doctrines have been asserted and ably defended by the first christian writers, as well as by those who have written in later times. The various creeds and formularies of faith have been transmitted down to us, and we are happy to find, that amidst the many departures from true religion in all ages, truth hath risen triumphant against opposition. You lament the corruptions of christianity with an ill grace; for you appear to me to be a great corrupter of it yourself. The rank weed of Socinianism is of very late growth, and however pleasing it may appear to the eye of fallen reason,

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it is poisonous both in its root and branches. You have attempted to water it, that it may grow and flourish, and spread in these kingdoms; but it shall be my business, and I pray that every faithful servant of God may see it to be his incumbent duty, to pluck up, root out, and destroy it as much as possible.

I need not inform you, Sir, but I would beg leave to inform the world, that you are not the head of a sect, but the close follower of Faustus Socinus, whose unscriptural tenets have been answered and confuted again and again, by many wise and good men. His false reasoning upon, and weak expositions of the divine Oracles, have been laid open with such powerful arguments by protestant divines of the established church, and by dissenters from it, that I only need to go over their ground fully to answer Dr. Priestley; and to prove, that neither he, nor Socinus, understand aright the christian religion. Nay, I will venture to go a step further to assert, and hope in the following sheets to prove, that Socinianism is only Deism in disguise, and that the difference between them is really indiscernible.

It will be absolutely necessary for us to agree in our first principles, before we enter into any debate. As you profess yourself to be an English Protestant Dissenter, I take it for granted, that you hold the Bible to be the rule of faith and practice—that all things necessary to be believed are contained therein—that in the New Testament are comprized all the doctrines of the Christian religion—that no ceremonies are now to be used, nor any practices to be enforced, but such as are commanded therein—that the Christian religion stands upon the truth of the Jewish—and that to overturn one, is to destroy the other—That all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. In a word, that in the Bible is the religion of Protestants.

I would therefore inform you, that I will have nothing to do in my present controversy, with Fathers, Popes or Councils: whether they were right or wrong is a matter of little moment: *Amicus Socrates, Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.* You may abuse Athanasius or St. Austin as much as you please—I do not feel myself hurt by it. I do not believe in the Trinity, or effectual grace, because they asserted it: the scriptures of
truth

truth are the ground on which I stand ; or rather, the castle walls on which I lift my head to level my artillery against your socinian batteries. A candid Romish disputant once observed, that while the Protestant Doctors kept within the close coverts of the scriptures, they were impregnable : but, says he, if we bring them out into the open fields of Fathers and Councils, we shall be able to cope with them. I intend, like them, to keep within the close covert of the scriptures : indeed it will save time and trouble. The disputes about their opinions are often as endless, as they are useless. As a Protestant dissenter you have gone off your proper ground. Suppose you could prove the point, that the primitive christians did not believe the atonement, the Godhead of Christ, &c. which you have by no means done, or can do : you have asserted it ; but to assert without proof, only proclaims the weakness of the asserter : suppose, I say, you could prove, that all the fathers, popes and councils were of your opinion, that is, were socinians ; while the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apostolic Epistles are transmitted down to us, as the only books of divine authority, by which all doctrines are to be proved, and all practices enjoined, I should chuse to believe what is
there

there written; and I would not scruple to oppose them all, as I do Dr. Priestley. I would never be such a slave to human authority, as to give up my own judgment and reason to conform to it. But if human testimony in favour of any opinion, appears to me to be reasonable, and consistent with the scriptures, I am then glad that others before me saw the truth and believed it. I believe the doctrinal articles of the church of England to be scriptural, and therefore can subscribe to them; not because they were agreed upon by a numerous body of good and learned men. If the latter were the ground of my faith, it would stand upon human, and not divine testimony.

The Apostles clearly foretold, that there would be a great departure from the faith—"That the
 " time would come, when men would not endure
 " sound doctrine, but would turn away their ears
 " from the truth, and be turned unto fables—
 " That false teachers should arise among profes-
 " sors, who should privily bring in damnable here-
 " sies, even denying the Lord that bought them,
 " and should bring upon themselves swift destruc-
 " tion—that many should follow their pernicious
 " ways, by reason of whom the way of truth should
 be

“ be evil spoken of”—Nay, St. John declares, “ That many false prophets were gone out into the “ world,” and that Antichrist was in the world in his time. Their predictions have been fully accomplished in past ages, and are now accomplishing. Your writings, Sir, are an evident fulfilment of their prophecies. You are endeavouring to overturn all the essential and fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, that you may dress up the idea of it, as only a system of moral precepts, which, you say, were delivered by Christ as a great prophet and law-giver. I grant you, that the moral precepts of Christ are an essential part of true religion ; and every faithful person acknowledges the divine authority of Christ, as the great Law-giver to his church, as much as you do. But we contend, this is only *part* of the Christian system ; and that if you deny the total fall of man in the loss of the Divine Image, the Trinity, the Atonement, you mutilate the whole, and leave it shorn of its capital parts.

Before I engage in the proof of these doctrines which you deny, I would first observe, how little respect you pay to those parts of holy writ you are pleased to disapprove of. Page 24, vol. i. you
 B say.

say, " the apostle Paul has strained very much by
 " the force of imagination, to reconcile the Jews
 " to the Christian religion, by pointing out the
 " analogies which he imagined the rites of the
 " Jewish religion bore to something in Christi-
 " anity." That the apostle Paul was the author of
 the epistle to the Hebrews is clearly proved by Dr.
 Owen in his comment on that epistle. It has been
 received as part of the sacred canon ; and till Dr.
 Priestley can find better arguments to disprove its
 authority, than I have seen to establish it, I shall
 consider it as written by the inspiration of God. To
 this assertion of yours I can therefore give no bet-
 ter epithet than blasphemous.—What, Sir—do the
 writings of this inspired penman proceed from the
 force of imagination only ?—Do you think, St.
 Paul did not know what he was about, when he
 wrote this divine epistle ?—Do you imagine he was
 as ignorant of the Jewish, as you are of the Chris-
 tian religion ?—Or do you suppose he was not
 made perfectly acquainted with the nature of the
 Christian religion, by the special revelation he was
 favoured with from heaven ?—I am very well con-
 vinced, that all your sentiments of religion, whe-
 ther Jewish or Christian, are only imaginations ;
 having no foundation in scripture or right reason,
 If

If *you* cannot see a chain of good and solid Arguments, drawn from Jewish premises in that epistle, to prove that the death of Christ was a proper sacrifice, typified and represented under the law; others, as learned, as wise, and as good as you, have seen it. If *you* cannot see the Godhead of Christ asserted in the first chapter, and the necessity of an atonement to reconcile fallen man to God, proved in the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th chapters, others have: and I shall take occasion to bring some passages from this epistle to prove, that Jesus of Nazareth is a person of much more exalted dignity than you allow.

In page 370, vol. ii. you assert, " That in the
 " theological repository you think you have shewn,
 " that the apostle Paul often reasons inconclu-
 " sively, and therefore, that he wrote as any other
 " person, of his turn of mind and thinking, and in
 " his situation, would have written, without any
 " particular inspiration." Your assertion here is
 more modest, than in the former quotation; but
 the assertion itself, is equally blasphemous and
 wicked. The humble, the modest, the protestant,
 the moral, the philosophic Dr. Priestley, reasons,
 it seems, more conclusively, that is, better, than
 B 2 the

the apostle Paul. What a loss it is to the church, that Dr. Priestley's matter and spirit had not been going to Damascus with the high priest's commission instead of the apostle Paul!—then, no doubt, Priestley's epistles would have been full of the most conclusive arguments, and all future heretics must have been silenced for ever. St. Paul, it seems, had no particular inspiration; that is, in other words, no inspiration at all; for if he had a general inspiration in all his epistles, he must have had a particular one; for generals include particulars. If there be any one part of the New Testament uninspired, let Dr. Priestley point out that part. It is true, the apostle in the 7th chap. of the first epistle to the Corinthians tells us, he gives his *advice* only, respecting marriage and celibacy; which advice, the catholic doctors call, counsels of perfection: that is, he advises those who would make eminent advances in the Christian life, to remain single as he did: that hereby they would be free from those worldly cares which generally attend the married state. And no doubt, an abstinence here, is a part of that self-denial, which Christ enjoined his disciples. To condemn marriage altogether, as some have done, is not countenanced by our apostle; he only gives the preference

ference to the single state, for the reasons before-mentioned. None can mistake the apostle's advice and reasoning in this chapter, unless they are blinded by passion or prejudice. I think all the apostle's reasons, conclusive and final; and I am happy in the thought, that they have appeared so to the whole christian church in all ages. If others shall take the same liberty with the apostolic writings as you have done—if one may attribute this part to imagination, and another think he can spy flaws in scriptural reasoning, we shall shortly have no part to reason upon; no judge of controversies, no certain standard of truth: this, I apprehend, is what you aim at. The Scriptures of the Old, as well as New Testament, have so many truths asserted in them, which do not square with your reason (the God you worship) that I am not surpris'd to find you desire to lessen their authority and weaken their influence: but know, Sir, all your attempts are as vain as those of Julian, Cæbrus, or Porphyry, of old time; or Hobbs, Mandeville, Bolingbroke, Hume or Voltaire, of later date. You may possibly be displeas'd, that I rank you with Infidels: my reason for so doing is, because I look upon you to be as great an enemy to true Christianity as they. Under the specious pretext

pretext of defending rational religion, you are secretly sapping the foundation of the Christian. But all your arrows, however subtle the poison with which they are tipped, will fall blunted and useless to the ground. The writings of the antient Infidels would scarce have been known—they would have been consigned to that oblivion they deserved, had not the masterly answers been preserved for the instruction of future ages: and your theological writings, though vanity may prompt you to think them immortal, will soon be forgotten. They may please men of corrupt minds, but the wise and good will never look into them a second time. You appear to be so totally a stranger to all divine influence, and so far led away by the delusive reasonings of depraved nature, that I cannot but lament your sad condition, and tremble for your future one, if God should be pleased to take you out of the world in your present sentiments. That very book which you pretend to own as the revealed will of God, will judge you at the last day; and instead of being a *defender*, you will appear to men and angels to be a *subverter* of the Christian faith.

You are pleased further to assert, that if your principles were adopted by Christians at large,
Jews

Jews and Turks would soon lay aside their prejudices, and embrace the Christian faith ; I should have said, *your* faith, and that of your followers. I deny the fact. The difference between you and the Turk and Jew is a sufficient cause of separation. If you insist upon this point, that Jesus of Nazareth is a greater Prophet than Mahomet, you will offend the Turk, as much as we who assert that he is God. If indeed you rank him below Mahomet, I do not know but you may bring over the Turk to your sentiments : but what would he gain thereby ?—Not one single benefit. He stands upon as good ground towards God already as you do. You may boast, that you have a better system of precepts, to direct your conduct, than him : I grant it ; but you have never regulated your practice by that system, nor *can you*, while you disbelieve the grand doctrines of the gospel. The disobeyed precepts will rise up in judgment against you at the last day, and I should prefer the condition of a moral Turk now, and at the last day, to yours. You sin against greater light than he does, and your doom will be heavier. The Turk, the Jew, or the Heathen may admire the morality of the gospel as you do ? but it is one thing to admire, and another, to obey it. You suppose you could
present

present the Prophet of Nazareth in so amiable a light to the Turk, that he would instantly renounce Mahomet, and become a disciple of Jesus. When you have made the experiment in Turkey, and it has proved successful, we will give credit to your supposition: but I am well aware, that no Socinian Apostles will ever have courage to go forth, with their lives in their hands, to convert Jews, Turks, or Heathens. You must, Sir, be endued with greater fortitude than nature or reason ever can furnish you with, thus to take up the cross and preach Christ. In order to convert the Turks to the Christian faith, there must be a larger, and more plenteous effusion of the divine Spirit upon us, than Christendom now enjoys. The blessings and comforts of Christianity must be felt in a manner that you have no conception of, by those who shall engage in the conversion of that large and deluded empire. They would receive so little advantage by your system, that it would be scarce worthy their acceptance: but when the time shall come, that God will be pleased to convert the nations, their sinful prejudices will subside, and the great truths of the Christian religion be received by them.

I also

I also deny, that if Christianity were universally modelled, according to your system, the Jews would become your converts: for you allow, that Jesus of Nazareth was a good man, and unjustly put to death by the Jews. Now the Jews to this day, approve of the act of their fore-fathers, and assert, that our Messiah was a deceiver; and therefore, suffered according to his deserts. They, of old, accused him of blasphemy, in making himself God; and if he were not God, he certainly was a blasphemer, a liar, and a deceiver, and suffered justly. You join in their unjust accusation of him, and approve of their condemnation of him on these grounds: you may reply, that you disapprove of their putting him to death, because he was a Prophet sent to them of God, to instruct them in his true worship—that the beneficent acts he performed in Judea, did not merit the treatment he received from them; and that his death is, to them and us, an example of patience, under the most cruel sufferings. On this ground, the Jew and yourself differ as widely, as the Jew and orthodox believer: but I add further, that your supposition is chimerical. You have not one fact to prove the point. When you can produce a list of Jews who have received Christianity, from the description of the Messiah

and his doctrine, and shall publicly avow, that the general sentiments of the Trinity were the great stumbling blocks in the way of their receiving him, we shall give a fair hearing to their objections: 'till that time arrives, we shall treat your supposition with the contempt it deserves.

Having said thus much in general, I now proceed to prove from the divine Oracles, that your sentiments concerning the Fall of Man, the Atonement and the Trinity, stand in diametrical opposition to them—that instead of giving the world, a scriptural portrait of true Christianity, you have drawn a deformed picture from ideas framed in your own darkened mind, and which, the wise, judicious, and Heaven-taught believer will never receive for a just likeness. I observed, that your sentiments of the fall, are erroneous: but I correct myself; you deny that there ever was a fall. The inspired account thereof given us by Moses, you wholly misunderstand and pervert. All the damage, you say, we received from Adam's sin is, that we must cultivate the earth by labour, and die the death of the body. I suppose you will allow, that the earth produced all things spontaneously, before Adam's sin, and that he was immortal. Your sentiments on this head are not original. The late Dr.
Taylor

Taylor of Norwich advanced the same falsities before, and I suppose, from him you had them. I would beg you to read Mr. John Wesley's answer to Taylor: in which you will find, his errors and yours, clearly, solidly, and judiciously answered. You say, page 281, vol. i. " That it must be naturally in the power of man (that is, of every man) to do the will of God—that this must be granted, if we suppose the moral government of God to be at all an equitable one." Now, Sir, I believe as much as you, that the moral government of God, is an equitable one, both with respect to angels and men: and yet, I deny, that it is in the power of any man (much less every man) since Adam's fall, naturally to do the will of God. The scriptures inform us, that God made man in his own image; and the apostle Paul tells us, that this image consists in righteousness and true holiness. He was placed in a garden of delight; sufficient to have stood, yet free to fall. God permitted him to be tempted by the evil spirit—set life and death before him—promised to reward obedience, and to punish disobedience. " In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." You say, this means only, that he was to become mortal, and die 930 years after his transgression—that he still retained

tained the moral image of God all the days of his life on earth, and was able to keep the whole law of God. On the contrary, I assert, that spiritual death, or the death of the soul, consisting in the loss of the divine image, instantly followed his transgression. Now the reason why you do not receive this account of the fall, is, because you are equally a stranger to spiritual death, and spiritual life. You are *animal rationale*, and no more :

“ And the natural man understandeth not the
 “ things of the spirit of God, neither can he know
 “ them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The nature of God’s law you utterly misunderstand, or you would never assert, that it is in your power, naturally, to fulfil the whole will of God, which is made known to us by his law. The moral law he delivered to the Israelites from Mount Sinai, and Jesus of Nazareth explains that law in his sermon on the Mount. St. James says, “ He
 “ that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all :”
 and St. John, “ He that hateth his brother, is a
 “ murderer.” The law of God, commands you and me, and all men, “ to love the Lord our God
 “ with all our heart, and our neighbour as our-
 “ selves.” Our Saviour explains who our neighbour is, by the parable of the Samaritan. The law
 denounceth

denounceth a "curse on every one that continueth
 "not in all things written in the book of the law
 "to do them." Now I ask, whether you will declare, in the face of the world, that you have naturally a power, perfectly to fulfil this law?—I also ask, whether you have ever fulfilled it? If you were at all acquainted with the nature, purity and extent of the divine law, you would never venture to say, that man, in his present state, hath a power inherent in himself to fulfil it. If man hath this boasted power, it is strange that it has never been exerted. In order to prove your position, you must produce a man who hath perfectly obeyed the law of God, in thought, word and deed, from the beginning, to the end of his life. This you will never be able to do; and I produce a scriptural truth to confute your error, namely, "that all
 "have sinned, and come short of the glory of
 "God." You not only contradict the scriptures, but the general sentiments of the Heathen world. They had some faint traditions conveyed down to them of the Mosaic account of the fall, but miserably corrupted. They looked back to a golden age, in which man was supposed to be free from the disorders which he now labours under, and they called their present state, an iron age, in which they
 lamented

lamented the loss they had sustained, and the evils brought upon them. They acknowledged that they were not, what they knew they ought to be; and to remedy their condition, were totally unable. They wanted that light of revelation which we enjoy, to remove their ignorance, and point out to them the way to procure the divine acceptance. They talked, with Dr. Priestley, of the sufficiency of repentance to appease the offended Deity, but this proved no relief to their guilty minds. Nay, they went further than you, in offering sacrifices, numerous and costly, to atone for their sins: but these not being of God's appointment, did not procure that satisfaction their consciences required. I proceed therefore to observe, that the divine displeasure was to be averted by sacrifice, and not singly by repentance. This method of procuring the favor of God, originally came from himself; was revealed to the Patriarchs, to Moses, the Prophets, and at last, in the fulness of time, the GREAT SACRIFICE was exhibited on Mount Calvary, to take away the sin of the world. That all the Jewish sacrifices were types of this one great sacrifice, the apostle Paul proves at large in his epistle to the Hebrews. His reasoning, in that excellent epistle, does not proceed, as you suggest, from the

the influence of a strong imagination, but from the extraordinary inspiration of the Spirit of God. All your notions about the death of Christ, proceed indeed from a strong, that is, a deluded imagination. Your acknowledging the authority of divine revelation, and yet denying all its essential and fundamental principles, marks your delusion in the strongest characters. You would act a much more consistent part, wholly to give up the Bible, and avow yourself a Deist, than to profess to honor it, while you are endeavouring, by every effort, to stab it to the heart.*

The orthodox faith, from which you have so widely deviated, hath in all ages taught, that man, as an offender, could not be reconciled to God, but by the intervention of a sacrifice. That simple repentance was not sufficient to accomplish this great work. The universal practice of the Jewish church

* The Reader who would wish to see Dr. Priestley's misrepresentations of ecclesiastical history, and matter of fact, may consult the monthly review for June and Sept. last, and Dr. Horley, arch-deacon of St. Alban's in his charge to the Clergy, delivered in May last : by which it appears, that he is only a new reviver of old exploded heresies, and that his mode of reasoning is as weak as his confident assertions.

church and Gentile world contradict your sentiments, and with a loud voice proclaim, the absolute necessity of a sacrifice in all religions. Before the giving of the law, we find the Patriarchs offering sacrifice: and the first man, namely Abel, whom scripture declares to be a righteous man, was so by the mediation of a sacrifice. The numerous sacrifices appointed in the Jewish ritual, sufficiently prove my present point. No, Sir, a Jew could not be forgiven but by a sacrifice: and lest they should mistake the means for the end, or rest satisfied with the performance of the one, without the attainment of the other, the prophets frequently take care to obviate and prevent that mistake, by asserting, that to obey, is comparatively better than sacrifice—that acts of prayer and praise, the love of God and our neighbour, are more pleasing to the Most High, than all burnt offerings and sacrifices—that to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, is more acceptable to him than thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil. If you believe that the Jewish religion is from heaven (and I do not find you have yet ventured to deny it) you act the most preposterous part that man ever did, in endeavouring to overturn the doctrine of Atonement. We assert, with all possible authority,

authority, both divine and human; that God himself revealed to man, that he would not be approached by a sinner, but by a sacrifice; and that the Jews, God's antient people, were strictly and solemnly enjoined thus to come to God. We declare, that the Heathens received this doctrine by tradition from the Patriarchs, and invariably observed it; and it is manifest beyond all doubt, that since the coming of Christ, all sacrifices, both among Jews and civilized Gentiles, have ceased; and let Dr. Priestley give a better account, if he can, of the reason of that cessation than orthodox believers do: which is, that all former sacrifices were types and representations of the great sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross: and that the substance being come, the types have disappeared. We affirm, that the death of Christ is a proper sacrifice and propitiation for sin, and that the excellency of the Christian religion consists partly in the excellency of its sacrifice—that all the merit of all other sacrifices was derived from this one, and that the Jew could receive no benefit from his sacrificed lamb, unless he looked forward with faith to his and our Messiah. We apprehend, that all Heathen sacrifices were an abomination to God, because they

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they had no respect to Christ. Ignorance and superstition were the parents of their devotion.*

The heavenly instruction conveyed by the doctrine of a vicarious sacrifice, is clear and apparent. Man, by sin, has destroyed himself—the spiritual death of the soul was the sad consequence of Adam's transgression. All we, his offspring, are now born in sin, and are spiritually dead. How shall it be consistent with the divine justice to receive such offenders again into his favour? Having once forfeited that favour, future obedience, if possible, could not restore it: if it could, God must cease to be just—but this cannot be. He therefore with his own arm, brings salvation. He appoints a sacrifice

* The death of Christ was a true, proper, and real propitiation for our sins, and not a mere figure or tropical form of speech, as too many conceive of it. Go ye Socinians and say, the blood of Christ is only a metaphor, and means no more in the mouth of a Christian than of an honest Heathen, who should say, he had been saved or benefited in a moral way, by the blood, that is, by the exemplary death of Socrates. The term washing, is indeed metaphorical: but the scriptures are unintelligible, and language itself has no meaning, if the blood of the Lamb slain, had not a true, direct, and proper efficacy to free us from the guilt and punishment of sin.

See Bp. Hurd's Sermons, vol. i, ser. 13.

fice for us. We have sinned, and deserved eternal death : he that is God and Man, in one person, dies for us, or in our stead. The infinite dignity of his person, gives an infinite value to his offering ; and whosoever, by faith, pleads it before God, shall find pardon for all his sins. Your mistakes in this matter arise from your ignorance of the nature of sin, on the one hand, and God's law on the other. You suppose it to be so trivial an offence, that a simple confession of, and sorrow for it, will be sufficient to reconcile us to God : but no degrees of sorrow, arising from ourselves, can ascertain forgiveness to the conscience ; whereas, the sacrifice of the death of Christ releases the mind of every true believer from all guilt ; and the strongest assurance is given us in the word of God, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. We not only hereby believe, but know, with a divine certainty, that we are forgiven ; and that God is reconciled unto us, through Christ. The Spirit bears testimony to the truth of the written word without, and to his own gracious operation within us, that we are the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Herein lies the essence of the whole doctrinal part of the Christian religion ; and it is the only foundation on which Christian morality can

be built. If this foundation be taken away, the whole superstructure must certainly fall. You have vainly and impiously attempted to raze the foundation to the ground; but your attempt to destroy it, will be as fruitless as that of the builders of Babel was, in erecting a tower, whose top might reach unto heaven. You have given us a long account of the mistakes entertained in past ages, respecting the Atonement, and the various opinions received concerning it: with these I am no way concerned, let them stand or fall. The doctrine of Atonement is clearly, fully, and frequently asserted in the New Testament. You suppose a case (which is indeed the case in hand) namely, that if the whole tenor of scripture should assert any particular doctrine, and this cannot be accommodated to your reason, that particular doctrine should remain unaccounted for. Why then don't you invariably declare, that you cannot account for the doctrine of Atonement by the dictates of your reason, and so leave it unaccounted for?—Instead of this, you totally deny it, and affirm, it cannot be found in scripture; or if it be, as it does not coincide with your reason, it cannot be true. I leave you to reconcile these contradictions at your leisure.

Now

Now it appears to thousands of the most reasonable men that ever lived, that the way of acceptance with God, by the Atonement of Christ, is the most rational method that could possibly be proposed to the sons of men. There is a very material difference between your conduct and mine, with respect to scripture doctrines. I have received this, as a first principle, not to be controverted, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God—that it is infallible and eternal truth. I find nothing in it contrary to my reason, but many things above it: these I call mysteries, and I do not pretend to account for them by any arguments drawn from nature, or reason. I see and feel too much of my own imperfection in judging of the most obvious things of sense, to suppose, that what I cannot account for in religion, must be false. The style, subject, and matter of the scriptures, to my reason, appear to be of God, and not of man; and every day that I live, I have fresh proof that they came from heaven. I see every declaration therein, continually fulfilling, and your errors in it are graphically described.

30 That reason, of which you boast, and which is the idol to which you bow down, is darkened by the

the mists of prejudice, pride, and abused learning. You have adopted a set of principles, fabricated in the Socinian schools: and the sacred scriptures must be tortured and wrested to conform unto them: and if this cannot be done, such texts must remain unaccounted for, or in other words, denied. I affirm, that reason must conform itself to revelation; you say, unless that be fully conformable to your reason, you will not believe. Like other false reasoners on scripture premises, you fly to figure and metaphor. A very common method this, when the most plain and cogent texts force themselves upon our assent. A late Theologist asserted, that Regeneration was a figurative expression; a bold Eastern metaphor: that it signified no more than a change of conduct, proceeding from good resolutions first formed in the mind, and then brought into act. Hereby this fallacious writer would endeavour to set aside the necessity of all divine operation on the human mind in order to its conversion unto God. He would, in compliment to the church, of which he was a presbyter, allow some little help needful to resolve well, and a small degree of aid to enable to act well: but the chief part of the work must be performed by the omnipotent power of man, and grace must be only an inferior coadjutor.

You assert, that these texts which literally hold forth the doctrine of Atonement, must be understood figuratively, or we shall be liable to fall into an error as absurd as transubstantiation. By no means: that doctrine contradicts all our senses. Not so, the doctrine of Atonement. What irrationality is there in this truth, that a person of infinite dignity, who is above all law, and knows no superior, shall, in my name, die for me, that I may not die for ever?—If a literal, that is, a true and proper Atonement will not be allowed, be pleased to shew me what you mean by a figurative one: for I confess I do not understand the term. You may ask twenty impertinent questions about the expediency and necessity of such a method of salvation; I answer, it is sufficient for me, that I find in the scriptures my salvation depends on my having an interest in the sacrifice of Christ the Lord. And though you could produce as many more objections against it, they would be of no importance, if the authority of the scriptures be conclusive and final. There it is written as with a sun-beam; and if you were not utterly blind, you must see it. The grand cause of this your ignorance, is, that you are a stranger to all divine operation. You were never convinced, by the spirit of God, that you are a sinner, and
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therefore, are unprepared to receive the doctrine of Atonement by Christ. Your conscience has never been alarmed with a sight and sense of the evil, guilt, and defilement of sin. You are a man, unawakened to every divine sensibility, and I cannot but consider all your sentiments of Christianity, like the reveries of a man talking in his sleep. With the powers of carnal reason, and the aids of human learning, you read the book of God; and it is no marvel to orthodox believers, that you explain it no better. If you would henceforth understand it aright, you must become a little child in your own eyes, renounce all the corruptions of your perverted reason, forget the opinions of men, and fall upon your knees before the throne of grace, humbly requesting the divine light to enlighten your dark understanding; praying that you may be converted and born of God. If you despise this advice, and refuse to take it, you must perish in your present ignorance, presumption and pride. But I hope this will not be your case: rather may you be made acquainted with the things that concern your peace; and may that pen which has hitherto darkened counsel, by words without knowledge, be henceforth employed in defending the great truths of the gospel.

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The grand and leading mistake in your system is, your opinion concerning the Person of Christ. You have given us the various sentiments entertained of him by heretics of early and later ages : and it is an evil much to be lamented, that the horrid blasphemy of Socinians hath reached the English shores. But the Lord, ever watchful over his church, was pleased to appoint three formularies of faith to be drawn up, and authority stamped upon them, that the truth might be conveyed down incorrupt to future ages. The Catholic and Protestant world hath universally agreed therein. These formularies of faith I have subscribed to, and I believe them, not because the church believes them, but because I am assured they may be proved, by plain deduction from the holy scriptures : and, however orthodoxy may be condemned by you, and your adherents, I esteem it the greatest blessing I enjoy ; and shall ever look on Arianism and Socinianism as dangerous opinions, utterly subversive of the gospel of Christ.

Your assertion, that the body of the Jewish nation expected a *mere Man* to come to redeem them, is utterly unsupported by any authority : for I ask, could a Jew really believe the following prophecies

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of their Messiah, and be consistent in expecting a mere Man to redeem them. Is. vii. 14. " Behold a
 " virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall
 " call his name, Immanuel." Is. ix. 6. " For unto
 " us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and
 " the government shall be upon his shoulder: and
 " his name shall be called, Wonderful, the Mighty
 " God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of
 " Peace." Jer. xxiii. 6. " This is his name
 " whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." Zech. xiii. 7. " Awake, O sword,
 " against my Shepherd, against the Man that is
 " my Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." Mic. v. 2.
 " But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be
 " little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of
 " thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be
 " Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been
 " from everlasting." I say, could any reasonable Jew be so inconsistent, as to allow these prophecies foretold their Messiah, and at the same time expect a mere Man to fulfil them? When you have produced such Jews, from good authority, we will be inclined to give credit to your assertion; but shall even then be obliged to say, that there are other men in the world as self-contradictory, in their religious tenets, as Dr. Priestley. The Jewish doctors,

tors, in the days of Herod, applied the before-cited prophecy of Micah (which asserts the Eternity of their Messiah) to Christ. These men must certainly have expected a person of greater consequence to fulfil it than you allow.

You are pleased further to affirm, that the body of the primitive Christians did not believe in the Godhead of Christ: and to prove the point, you adduce the opinions of a few, who were condemned for not believing the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, by the majority of true believers. I shall therefore first recommend to your perusal, Jones's Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity, Dr. Owen on the same subject—Mr. Hervey's Letters, and Dr. Neve's sermons, at Bampton's lecture. When you have confuted these writers on the subject, by solid argument and fair reasoning, drawn from scripture premises, your scheme may become worthy of notice. But lest these writers should not fall in your way, I shall suppose the books of the New Testament, put into the hands of any unprejudiced Heathen, I would then call his attention to the following texts. John i. 1. "The Word was God." verse 14. "The Word was made flesh." Chap. vi. 35. "I am the bread of life. He that eateth

“ eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” Chap:
 x. 27, 28. “ My sheep hear my voice, and I give
 “ unto them eternal life, neither shall any pluck
 “ them out of my hand.” Chap. xii. 41. “ These
 “ things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and
 “ spake of Him :” that is, of Christ, who is the
 Lord of Hosts.
 Acts vii. 59. Stephen prays, “ Lord Jesus re-
 “ ceive my spirit.” Chap. xx. 21. “ Feed the
 “ church of God, which he hath purchased with his
 “ own blood.” Rom. ix. 5. “ Of whom as con-
 “ cerning the flesh, Christ came, *who is over all,*
 “ God blessed for ever, Amen.” I. Cor. vi. 15,
 17. “ Know ye not, that your bodies are the
 “ members of Christ? He that is joined to the
 “ Lord, is one spirit.” Phil. ii. 6. “ Christ
 “ thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”
 Heb. i. 8. “ Unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne,
 “ O God, is for ever and ever.” See verse 10,
 11, and 12. I. Pet. i. 11. “ The spirit of Christ
 “ was in the Prophets, and testified before-hand of
 “ the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should
 “ follow.” I. John iii. 16. “ Hereby perceive we
 “ the love of God, because he laid down his life
 “ for us,” Chap. v. 20. “ We are in him that is
 “ true,

“ true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the
 “ true God, and eternal life.” Jude v. 25. “ To
 “ the only wise God our Saviour be glory.” Rev.
 i. 5, 6. “ Unto him that hath loved us, and washed
 “ us from our sins in his own blood, and hath
 “ made us kings and priests unto God and his Fa-
 “ ther, to him be glory and dominion for ever
 “ and ever.” Verse 17, “ I am the first and the
 “ last.” Chap. v. 12. “ Worthy is the Lamb to
 “ receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and
 “ strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”
 Chap. xix. 16. “ He hath a name written, King
 “ of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” The valedictory
 prayer of most of the Epistles and of the Revelati-
 ons is, “ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be
 “ with you all, Amen.”

Now I ask, is it probable, or possible, for any
 unprejudiced Heathen to read the above-cited
 texts of scripture, and not clearly see, that the Apostles
 would have their readers form much more ex-
 alted sentiments of Jesus, than you entertain? To
 affirm, with these passages full in our view, that the
 Lord Christ is only a good Prophet, and no more,
 is not to expound, but to destroy the very meaning
 of words: and orthodox believers would be at a
 loss

loss to account for such horrid perversions of language as you are guilty of, if they did not know, what blindness and ignorance of God and his Christ, is in the soul of man by nature; and what a rooted enmity there is against the glory of the seed of the woman. This enmity darkens all the powers of the mind, so that you cannot see what is as evident as the noon-day sun to others. If your sentiments are scriptural, the Bible must be a book, written purposely to mislead us, and to make us give that worship to a man, which is due only to the eternal God.

The Personality and Godhead of the Spirit, is as clearly revealed, as the Godhead of the Son. Some indeed who are strangers to his sacred influence, profess a belief in his Godhead: but the deniers of his Godhead, cannot partake of his influence. You are an utter stranger to divine influence: you know not the Christian's God. You hide yourself under the thin covert of what you call, rational Christianity, while at the same time you are a cool, determined opposer of its fundamental truths. I shall just throw a few texts in your way, which are the ground of my belief in the Godhead of the Spirit—Gen. i. 2. “The Spirit of God moved
“ upon the face of the waters.” Job xxxiii. 4.

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" The Spirit of God hath made me." Ps. cxxxix. 7.
 " Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" Is. lix. 21.
 " My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which
 " I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of
 " thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor
 " out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the
 " Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Mat.
 xxviii. 19. " Go ye therefore and teach all nati-
 " ons, baptizing them in the name of the Father,
 " of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." To teach,
 to convince, to bring to remembrance, and to com-
 fort, are the acts of a person; and these are seve-
 rally attributed to the Spirit. See John xiv. 16, 17,
 and 26.—John xvi. 8—11. Acts v. 3. " Why
 " hath Satan filled thy heart, to lye to the Holy
 " Ghost?"—Verse 4. " Thou hast not lyed unto
 " men, but unto God." I. Cor. ii. 10. " The
 " Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things
 " of God."—11th, and following verses, furnish us
 with a sufficient answer to all your vain reveries.
 I. Cor. vii. 19. " Know ye not that your body is
 " the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,
 " which ye have of God, and ye are not your
 " own?" A temple is the residence of a God;
 and the Most High dwelleth *not* in temples made
 with hands. When *your* body shall have this high
 honour

honour conferred upon it, to be made a living temple of the Holy Ghost, you will cease your blasphemies against the Trinity, and will humbly fall down and adore that God whose name you now profane. I. Cor. xii. 11. " But all these
 " worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, divid-
 " ing to every man severally as he will." II. Cor. xiii. 14. " The communion of the Holy Ghost be
 " with you all. Amen." Col. ii, 2. " To the ac-
 " knowledgment of the mystery of God, and of
 " the Father, and of Christ."—God the Spirit is
 " here placed before the Father and the Son.

As you seem to acknowledge the authority of the Old Testament, I would advise you to consult those passages therein, which in the New are applied to Christ, by infallible interpreters. Hereby you will find divine attributes given to Christ and the Holy Ghost as well as to the Father. I would refer you to Is. vi. 5. compared with John xii. 41. —Is. xlv. 6. compared with Rev. xxii. 13.—Is. vii. 14. compared with Mat. i. 23.—Ps. lxxviii. 56. compared with I. Cor. x. 9.—I. Kings viii. 39. compared with Rev. ii. 26.—Ps. lxviii. 17, 18. compared with Eph. iv. 8.—Zech. xii. 10. compared with John xix. 37.

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When the holy mystery of the Trinity is held forth by true believers, and it is declared, that faith is required therein, in order to make us partakers of the blessings peculiar to Christianity, it is very common for men of your stamp, violently to declaim against uncharitableness and bigotry. While you would set yourselves off as men of enlarged sentiments, of a liberal turn of mind—as persons of candour and reason, you would fix every possible stigma upon those who earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. I have frequently conversed with men of an Arian and Socinian cast, who have often been desirous of compromising the difference between us, on these important subjects. They would allow, that my error about the Trinity, was harmless; and wanted me to make the same concession to them: this I never could do, nor shall I to Dr. Priestley. The faith I contend for, is scriptural, apostolic, primitive, true: the faith you have laid down, is novel, false, unreasonable, unscriptural. I refuse any compromise with men of your sentiments; being well satisfied, that my principles are grounded on infallible truth, and I have such evidence for them, as you cannot possibly have for yours. This error of yours, is not only speculative, but practical: for I have never found the man yet who disbelieved

the Godhead of Christ, but also denied the Fall, and the influence of the Spirit upon the soul. The speech of such men soon betrays them, and the orthodox well know on what false ground they stand. Their faith is founded on the wisdom of men, and not on the power of God. I shall ever esteem it an honour to follow the examples of the primitive Christians, whose steady adherence to this one truth, that Jesus was the *only* wise God our Saviour: and that the just consequence flowing from that truth was, that all other Gods were Idols, and that the worshippers of them were deceived by an evil spirit; brought upon them the most cruel persecutions. They were charged with bigotry, obstinacy, and uncharitableness. Had they allowed every man to worship his own God in common—Had they been what is called charitable, candid, and liberal in their sentiments, they might have lived upon good terms, with the Heathen world: but this false peace, they scorned. They affirmed constantly, and invariably, “We worship the true God, you worship Idols.” I know you do not profess to condemn my sentiments, as dangerous to salvation; you consider them as errors of judgment: and you have such exalted notions of the divine mercy, as to believe, that God will never punish any man for an error in judgment.

judgment. Such language is very plausible, but very fallacious. Error, always endeavours to put on some agreeable form, to make it passable : but naked truth wants no ornament to recommend it.

If your sentiments are right, bring forth your triumphant believers in the hour of death, glorying in this, that they have freed themselves from our superstitions ; and that they can with pleasure go to the regions of the blessed, to sing for ever, “ Worthy is the Lamb, to receive power, &c.” I have seen the fatal effects of your poisonous opinions, in dying persons : some of whom have had grace given them, in the eleventh hour, to renounce them, and to embrace the true faith, to the joy of their souls. I have also seen believers dying in the triumphs of faith, acknowledging Jesus as their Lord, and their God. And I address myself to you, Sir, in particular, and assure you, that however easy and self-satisfied you may be, in your present errors, the approach of death (if you are favoured with a knowledge of its approach) will put your opinions to the trial, and they will certainly deceive you. Nothing can give comfort and confidence to a dying man, but a firm belief, that God has laid down his life for him, and thereby saved him from eternal misery.

It is a very common position with those who boast themselves in philosophic and rational Christianity, "That where mystery begins, religion ends." This I dare contradict. The union of the Three Persons in the Godhead—the union of the Godhead and Manhood of Christ—and the union of God with believers, I call mysteries. Yea, further, the union of matter and spirit is a mystery, which all your philosophy has not yet investigated; and such they will ever remain to the human mind. Some deny them all, and affirm, they do not exist. It is allowed, that the practical duties of true religion, are plain, and easy to be understood: it would be happy for us, if we could as easily perform them. Some vainly attempt to solve these mysteries, and others think themselves wise, in laughing at them. I do not pretend to comprehend these mysteries, but I shall ever maintain, that they are revealed in the sacred scriptures, and therefore I believe them: they are above, but not contrary to our reason. When the Papist calls upon me to believe transubstantiation, and tells me, that the doctrine of the Trinity is equally incomprehensible; and that if my faith can receive one, it may the other: I answer, transubstantiation contradicts my senses, as well as my reason; but the Trinity contradicts neither my senses, nor my reason. Is it
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irrational to believe, that God is three-fold, in one respect, and one, in another?—Then it must be equally irrational to believe, that a certain mathematical figure is three-fold, in one respect, and one, in another: that is, triangular, and unicentral. When we speak of the Trinity, we never assert, that three, are one, or one, three: this would be self-contradictory: but it is no contradiction to say, that the Godhead is personally, Three; essentially, One. There are mysteries in nature, which neither you, nor any other philosopher, can solve. You must content yourself with simple affirmations; that so it is; but why, you cannot tell. For instance: fire, light, and air are tri-une; they co-exist, and are inseparable—Each hath peculiar properties; and the manner of their union, remains a secret to the present hour.

We are commonly charged with the error of tritheism, when we affirm, that there are Three Persons in the Godhead: but this charge is founded on a wrong conception of the word, Person. It must be granted, that there is imperfection, in all language, since the fall of man: and many disputes about the Trinity, have sprung, from misunderstanding the terms, used by the disputants on both sides. I confess, I cannot find a better word to
express

express my conceptions of the Trinity ; which conceptions I have received from reading the scriptures. I am as far from believing there are three Gods as you are: the unity of the Godhead, I as firmly believe, as you do—it is the first principle of all religion. The Jew, the Turk, and Dr. Priestley contend, that there is only One Person in the Godhead: the Christian affirms, there are three Persons, but one God. I would recommend you to read the works of Hutchinson, who has unanswerably proved the Godhead of Christ, from the writings of the Old Testament. By comparing the Old Testament with the New, you will find the most cogent proofs rise up to your view, to confirm this grand and leading article of the Christian faith; and which would influence your judgment, if prejudice, and corrupt attachment to a system, had not totally blinded you.

Thus, Sir, I have produced scriptural proofs for those doctrines which you deny, but which I deem essential to the Christian faith. Had you attacked, ever so severely, any matters of doubtful disputation, whether doctrinal or practical, I should not have thought it worth while to have come forth to oppose you: but as you have impiously dared to lift up your impotent arm against the bulwarks of

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Christianity, I could not forbear mounting the walls, and levelling my scriptural artillery against you. What effect my arguments may have upon you, I know not; but leave the event to him, whose I am, and whom I serve in the gospel of his dear Son. I hope you are not yet past feeling, or given up to a reprobate mind. This good effect, I humbly presume, will follow from the publication of my sentiments, that they will put some stop to that poison which you wish to scatter through the land. Opposition to divine truth, frequently causes a more accurate investigation thereof, and ultimately tends to establish it. The opposition of Pelagius to the doctrine of grace, drew forth the able reasoning of Austin. You may prove, though undesignedly, the instrument of good to some; who, being either wavering or careless before, may, by a closer examination of these points, become effectually convinced. Be this as it may, when erroneous opinions are published and spread abroad, it is the indispensable duty of God's servants, to stand forth and defend that faith which has so much argument and reason on its side.

In the last and present century, all the arguments in favour of Deism, Arianism, and Socinianism, have been answered over and over again, by
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the most able, learned and spirited divines. But old books, however good, are generally laid aside. New books will have new readers : and many will, perhaps, read my letter, because addressed to you. Candor, and love of truth, may prompt them to hear the other side of the question, and they may probably be convinced of the errors which you have instilled into them.

Though I have spoken with freedom and severity against your opinions, yet, I hope, not with acrimony : having not the least personal enmity against you. Your natural abilities, I admire and honour ; and sorry I am, that the enemy of mankind, has, in you, so able an advocate. I assure you, that my most earnest prayers have been, and shall be put up to that Saviour, whose salvation you are now opposing, that he would be pleased to open your eyes, as he once did Paul's ; and then you will preach that faith which now you attempt to destroy. Glad, exceeding glad shall I be, and so will all the well-wishers to true religion, to behold you convinced of your sinful estate by nature, that you may be prepared to receive Christ, not only as a Prophet to teach you, but as a Priest to atone for, and a King to reign over you.

I am, Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

E. S.